

NEW YORK SOCIETY OF MEDICAL JURISPRUDENCE.

First Meeting, Jan. 11, 1883.

The meeting was called to order in the name of a preliminary committee, by GEORGE P. AVERY, Esq.

Mr. Avery stated in brief the circumstances that attended the present founding of a new Society of Medical Jurisprudence in New York, and announced that the objects of the Society were, among other things, to create a higher standard of expert testimony in medico-legal matters, the investigation of State medicine, as well as advancing the science of medical jurisprudence in general, and the study of "preventive medicine."

The Society already numbered over a hundred members.

Mr. Avery's address was listened to with marked attention and applause.

The chairman then called upon the secretary of the preliminary meeting, Dr. BRILL, to read the minutes of the meeting held Dec. 22, 1882, to effect the organization of the Society.

The temporary secretary read a list of the members proposed, and who had personally accepted, and a list of the committees on various details of organization.

The by-laws had been read at this meeting by Mr. Eller, and accepted.

The following officers had been elected:—Vice-President, Professor J. S. Wight, M.D.; Secretary, Dr. N. E. Brill; Financial Secretary, S. B. Livingstone; Corresponding Secretary, Dr. J. F. Chauveau; Treasurer, Dr. E. C. Harwood;

Trustees, G. P. Avery, A. J. Delaney, Max F. Eller, Dr. T. C. Finnell, Dr. A. M. Jacobus, and Dr. C. S. Wood.

The office of president had not yet been filled. A seal had been chosen, some further matters arranged, and the preliminary meeting of organization had then adjourned.

The report of the temporary secretary was approved, and the meeting proceeded with the further business of the evening, which consisted in listening to a paper, entitled: "The bearing of illusions and hallucinations on testimony," by Prof. J. S. WIGHT, M.D.

Professor Wight's paper consisted, in the main, of an enumeration of instances demonstrating that human testimony could not be relied upon—that the evidence of our senses was to be trusted,—that, in short, human judgment is fallible. Many of these instances were those of the ordinary mistakes of every-day life, ranged without much systematization under the heading of delusions.

Professor Wight's definition of hallucinations and illusions was of a more definite character. The first he defined as an imagined perception of a real thing; the latter as a real perception of an imagined thing.

Dr. HAMMOND was called upon to open the discussion. He said that he had hoped that Dr. Wight would have suggested a remedy for the state of affairs he had described. Few can rely on their perceptions, perhaps no one. Some people never see aright or hear aright. There were numerous historical instances of two opposite accounts of the same scene. If Dr. Wight could not rectify this, he did not advance the matter. He did not quite understand what Dr. Wight meant by an illusion of the moral sense, because he did not believe that there was a moral sense existing in the individual apart from the growth of experience due to his perceptions.

Dr. WIGHT interpolated that he did believe there was a moral sense, and that it constituted a faculty of the human mind.

Dr. HAMMOND thought that in most instances where Dr. Wight had used the term illusion he meant delusion. Mistakes should not be called illusions, nor did he see how a capacity for making mistakes could influence testimony.

Mr. BENN thought the terms illusion and delusion should be restricted to disease. Instances of the kind brought forward by Prof. Wight were sometimes mistakes, sometimes delusions.

Mr. ELLER said that his view of Dr. Wight's paper was that it was to be taken to mean that witnesses may be sincere and honest, and yet may recite conclusions based upon facts that never existed. An instance of this was a baseless claim of rape during anæsthesia. Juries must be taught that these delusions may exist; this was the function of the lawyer guided by the doctor.

Dr. SPITZKA thought that it was a canon of psychology that there are moral sentiments in the human race, and that there was such a thing as a fundamental moral failure of these sentiments. For example, a child born of the criminal classes, but early transplanted among excellent moral surroundings would often become a prostitute and a thief. The moral sentiments, for instance, are analogous to color-perceptions. Training implants upon the race the moral sense. He would substitute for Dr. Wight's definition of hallucination this, viz: a subjective perception of an object not really present.

Mr. HOCHSTETTER begged to be excused from making any remarks.

Mr. LIVINGSTONE suggested that more should be done to correct the perceptions by training. In children the early prattle is not noticed, and habits of inaccuracy are very early cultivated. The expert should always study to correct himself, and train his powers of observation.

Dr. HAMMOND arose to correct the impression conveyed by Dr. Spitzka. He did not say that there was no moral sense—he said that the moral sense was not born with a man; nor did he say that there were no moral sentiments. Criminals, of course, might be said to have no moral sense, but this was because they were deficient in some part of their intellectual organization, and, therefore, could not be educated up to a moral sense.

Dr. WIGHT, in summing up and concluding the discussion, maintained that the moral sense was an original inherent faculty of the mind, born with the individual.

The next paper of the evening was by L. C. Gray, M.D., and entitled "The case of Margaret Keppel, the Brooklyn child-abductor." The paper consisted of a simple narrative of the circumstances of the child-abduction, and did not therefore draw forth discussion.

The chairman announced that at the next meeting a paper would be read by Dr. Hammond, and also one on the "Medico-legal phase of the penal code."

The Society then adjourned.